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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Syria - Assassination of
Gebrane Tueni WTO Ministerial
PARIS - Tuesday, December 13, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Syria - Assassination of Gebrane Tueni
WTO Ministerial

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

A number of domestic social and economic stories dominate today's front pages, the most notable being Le Parisien and its banner headline: "The President Answers Our Readers." Inside, nine-pages are devoted to the President answering the fifty questions put to him by readers in a previous issue. Many of the questions are a follow-up to the unrest in the suburbs last month: they deal with housing, schooling, apprenticeship, unemployment and colonialism.

Catholic La Croix devotes its lead, "Attacks in Beirut, Damascus in the Line of Fire" and editorial, to the assassination yesterday of Gebrane Tueni in Beirut, while Le Figaro titles its front-page article: "Syria Behind a New Attack in Beirut." Liberation carries a picture of Tueni and states underneath: "An Anti-Syrian Gunned Down in Lebanon." (See Part C) Le Figaro interviews Gisele Khoury, a journalist and the widow of a slain Lebanese journalist: "The Syrians are clearly behind. The international community must investigate these political assassinations. and also stop the negotiations that seem to be going on with Syria behind our backs for a political solution."

The WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong was widely covered in the electronic media, with a consensus about the limited chances for success, and the growing role of NGOs. The commentator on France 2 television said: "The NGOs outnumber the official representatives to the conference. They may even up-stage its official opening." Le Figaro carries several op-eds on the negotiations. Zaki Laidi asks: "Is Europe Guilty?" (See Part C) while the President of the Farmers Association pens an op-ed explaining why agriculture must be taken out of trade the negotiations. In an interview in Le Parisien, Agriculture Minister Dominique Bussereau says: "Agriculture is not a sector like the others. It is a highly strategic sector. Look at the efforts the Americans are making to safeguard their sector. France, a major player in agriculture, industry and the service sector has always said these three sectors should be treated on the same level." Le Monde devotes a special section to the WTO: "A Powerless Institution." Le Monde comments: "Ten years after its creation, the WTO has limited means and has yet to prove its worth. Multilateralism is threatened."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Syria - Assassination of Gebrane Tueni

"At the End of the Tunnel, Freedom"

Dominique Quinio in Catholic La Croix (12/13): "Once again terrorism has hit Lebanon, killing a Christian legislative representative and renowned journalist. This is the thirteenth attack since Hariri's assassination. They have all targeted high-profile figures, who were clearly anti-Syrian. Syria is once again in the line of fire, although it denies all accusations. Tueni's death occurred as the UNSC was examining the conclusions of the report on Hariri's assassination. The interim report clearly fingered Syrian intelligence and asked for Syria's full cooperation. Tueni's death will re-enforce the determination of all those - the UN, Europe and the U.S.- who want to help Lebanon free itself from all foreign intervention. Many dream of a Lebanon where, in the midst of a convulsing Middle East, 'a miracle' of coexistence between communities and a 'miracle' of democracy are still possible. Some are trying to kill this dream. The international community, and France in particular, owe the Lebanese unfailing support. As a tribute to those who have lost their lives for a dream."

"France's Initiative at the UN"

Jean-Christophe Ploquin in Catholic La Croix (12/13): "France, the engine leading the international community in the Syrian-Lebanese crisis, reacted quickly and firmly to the assassination. The terrorist violence (in Lebanon) re-enforces the feeling in the French capital that the UNSC must pursue the logic of resolution 1559 and the call for Lebanon's independence. Today, France will be putting forward a new initiative at the UN asking for the investigation into Hariri's murder to continue despite the withdrawal of Detlev Mehlis. Meanwhile, the message from Syria is interpreted by a French diplomat: 'You wanted Syria to withdraw? Now you have it and the instability that goes with it.' The Lebanese are afraid that a lack of persistence from the international community might leave them in the midst of internal divisions and open to influence from their powerful neighbor. This is why France will try to get a quick answer from the UNSC about the Mehlis report. France has been locked into a strong-arm struggle with Syria for the past two years in its attempts to push Syria out of Lebanon. France's biggest success in this regard is having brought the U.S. into this endeavor. The same diplomat offers this thought: 'We convinced the U.S. that its ambition for democracy in the Middle East could not be convincing unless Lebanon, the Arab nation where democracy was rooted, could not flourish.' Syria for its part was taken short by this close coordination between France and the U.S."

"Syria's Murky Role"

Hubert Coudur in regional Le Telegramme (12/13): "These repeated attacks and assassinations of anti-Syrian figures are forcing the Lebanese people to lose hope. What is making the Syrians so certain of their impunity, after having opted for a low profile and assured Washington of their cooperation in the Hariri investigation? Especially just when the Mehlis report was due? One has to wonder whether Bachir Al-Assad does not entertain a relationship with small Islamic cells in Lebanon that may have replaced Syria's secret service."

WTO Ministerial

"WTO: Is Europe Guilty?"

Zaiki Laidi in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/13): "Why is everyone pointing a finger at Europe, and is this accusation founded? The European agricultural market is four times more protected than the U.S. market. Hence the formal offensive by the U.S. and Brazil to get Europe to lower its tariffs. But is Europe guilty? Liberalizing agriculture, an enviable goal, would not benefit all developing nations. Every serious study, whether French or American, has proven it is impossible to evaluate the global worth of a liberalized agricultural market simply because it all depends on the situation of each nation." STAPLETON